

2 *Faith in God vs. Scientific Reason*



*Low Memorial Library, Columbia University*¹

I want to thank you for coming tonight. I count it a privilege to speak about three of the loves of my life: science, mathematics, and Jesus Christ. Now there are many people who have a hard time putting these three together, but I have a hard time separating them, and I think that you will understand why by the time I am done this evening.

The idea that faith in God and scientific reasoning are *separate* and *incompatible* realms has gained wide acceptance in recent years in our culture. But it was not always so, and there are many who do not

agree with that separation today. Beginning in the “Enlightenment” of the 1600’s and 1700’s, men such as Voltaire, Hume, and Locke sought to replace *faith in God* with *faith in man*. What Jaan Vaino spoke regarding his astronomy professor, and certainly what I have heard from some of my own professors, is that faith in man has been substituted for faith in God in much of academia.

The claim of the Enlightenment was that science had provided the proof that God was unnecessary. The “religious” ages that preceded the Enlightenment were labeled as the “Dark Ages,” a label I remember from my classes when I was in school. It was not until the 1990’s that this label was discredited and removed from the teaching of history, because the years the Enlightenment described as the Dark Ages were anything but. Nevertheless, the tendency today is to ignore that many of the major scientific breakthroughs that occurred before, during, and after the Enlightenment were made by men who were serious believers in God. In the words of Peter Gay,

science could give the deists and atheists great comfort and supply them with what they wanted—Newton’s physics without Newton’s God.²

I will go into the issue of Newton’s God later.

Such anti-religious thinking prevails in much of academia today. A 1981 resolution of the Council of the National Academy of Sciences declared,

Religion and science are separate and mutually exclusive realms of human thought whose presentation in the same context leads to misunderstanding of both scientific theory and religious belief.³

Granted, there are matters in the realm of religion, and some in the realm of science, which are purely human imagination. But, separating the knowledge of God from the study of the universe He created is like separating our knowledge about Leonardo da Vinci from the study of the Mona Lisa. Why should we only look at what has been made—and ignore the nature and motivation of the One who created all things?

Cornell Professor William Provine, a leading historian of science, gives voice to views that many hold today. He insists that conflict between science and religion is inevitable, a declaration that I have often heard in the academic realm. He insists that those who hold on to religious beliefs while accepting evolutionary biology “have to check [their] brains at the church-house door.” I thank God that I neither had to check my brain at the door of church, nor in my organic chemistry class at Yale. Provine also states, and